

Book Review

SEX ERRORS OF THE BODY AND RELATED SYNDROMES

John Money

Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1994, pp. 132.

This slender book, written by one of the world's leading authorities on sexual development and psychosexual function, offers frank and open discussions of a group of abnormalities in sexual development. As the title implies, these are treated as sex errors of the body, an effort to demystify them and to make discussion of them more accessible and less stigmatizing. It seeks to make sexological information available to interested scholars and therapists and to persons affected by the group of conditions discussed.

The sixteen chapters address a range of issues. Beginning with a general discussion of knowledge and attitudes about sex, the book goes on to consider specific descriptions of particular sex errors in development resulting from abnormal gonadal and organ development as well as chromosomal and hormonal errors. Gender transposition and copulatory impairment are covered, and three chapters are devoted to counseling techniques and strategies for opening and managing discussions with children and adults. The sex chromosome abnormalities covered are the ones familiar to all geneticists. A wide variety of hormonal and developmental errors fills the pages. While directed toward the non-medical reader, the information presented can also inform the medical professional in many ways. A substantial number of medical terms is used, but all are carefully defined.

This book will make extremely interesting reading for all of the categories of readers for whom it is intended. The medical geneticist, no matter how experienced in these disorders, will learn something from reading it. It achieves its goal of accessibility to the general scholar and lay public well. Terms are carefully defined, complex anatomy is diagrammed for clarity, and no extensive prior scientific knowledge is assumed.

As expected, given the distinction of its author, this volume has many strengths. Throughout, the language is clear and radiates sensitivity to the potential pain and harm caused by words carelessly applied. The many photographs illustrate the phenotypic features of the many conditions discussed. Quite deliberately, the anatomical features of the genitalia are clearly shown. An example is an infant with 45,X/46,XY, dysgenetic gonads, and sexual ambiguity, of whom the photograph clearly illustrates and helps the reader appreciate the dilemma of sex assignment. Illustrations such as this one contribute to the sense of frankness and openness of the work, and give the reader a clear impression of what is meant by such descriptions as gynecomastia, anorchia, incomplete masculinization, vaginoplasty,

and others. Chapter 6, covering external organ anomalies, provides an example of the sensitive and frank discussions that characterize the author's style. This is especially clear in the area of sex reassignment, micropenis, and vaginal atresia. The feelings that the parents and the young boy or girl need to confront are soundly outlined. The suggestions on how to facilitate discussion with others outside the family is masterful and should be read by anyone dealing with these anomalies. This section exemplifies the material that is valuable for patients, families, and medical professionals alike. The author addresses sex education for children with sex development anomalies; the use of the term "birth defect of the sex organs" is especially noteworthy. Chapter 11, on gender identity is particularly clear, with illustrations, discussion of surgical procedures, and elucidation of psychosocial concerns.

As with any endeavor, a few areas of concern surface. Figure 22, in chapter 6 bothered me: the demonstration of the anatomy is clear and appropriate; however, the restraint of the patient gives a harsh appearance. Figure 47, in chapter 11 is an excellent example of sex-reversal surgery, but would be even more helpful if the centimeter height scales of the before and after photographs were at the same magnification. The counseling guide would be better if the importance of non-directive counseling were buttressed with recognition of the role of patient autonomy rather than by the suggestion that guilt or shame may result from not following the counselor's advice. While there is a list of references at the end, the professional would find documentation of some of the material from the author's experience helpful.

The combinations of frankness and sensitivity and of open discussion without endorsement of license provides a model for sex education for young children as well as adolescents. I agree with the position the author implies that the public should be more aware that birth defects of the sex organs occur. Such knowledge might prepare people better for encountering these situations in their daily lives as parents, teachers, athletic coaches, dance teachers, sales associates, and others who interact with children and adults. Any medical professional caring for patients and families with this group of conditions should strive to discuss the anatomy, physiology, and sexology as clearly and sensitively as outlined in this book. Read the chapter that Money calls The Parable Technique. You won't be able to help learning something.

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